

The Wintonbury Drummer



Newsletter of the Wintonbury Historical Society

Bloomfield, Connecticut

May 2012

Next meeting: June 6, 2012 *Dinner 6:00 p.m. / Program 7:00 p.m. / Meeting 8:00 p.m.*
Location: Sacred Heart Church, Wintonbury Ave., Bloomfield, CT
Program: Photographic memories of Connecticut River Watershed barns
Presenter: Lowell Fewster

The mission of the Wintonbury Historical Society is to identify, collect, organize, preserve and make accessible historical information about the diverse people, places, institutions and events of Bloomfield, Connecticut. *(adopted May 16, 2012)*

Past Perambulations: The Best of Times

Spring time brings warm sunshine, green grass, beautiful flowers, and new life to our trees and vegetable gardens. It is the time that high school seniors think about graduation and the endless possibilities of the “new lives” that come with this independence. It also is the time when other “seniors”—Senior Citizens—reflect on their carefree high school days and attend get-togethers to renew old friendships and catch up on old friends. I attended one such gathering just last week: Bloomfield High School’s class of 1948 luncheon. What a gathering that was! We “oldies” may not know where we left out glasses, but we can remember the good times of growing up in Bloomfield and the fun of our teenage years.

Our high school building has been torn down and replaced by a police station, but we still remember the school’s large rectangular windows that let sunshine and warmth into the rooms. The steep stairway floors squeaked as we walked up and down and gave reason for students in classrooms nearby to watch the door that was open to the hall to see who had made all that noise. Even though the hallways were large, they seemed crowded as pupils changed classes. Some times a game of “keep away” was played with a book or shoe that had been dropped, and that certainly added to the commotion of the hallway as well as afforded a few minutes of laughter.

Every classroom had chair/desks lined up in even rows and a blackboard in the front of the room. Yes, the boards were black, slate, and we wrote on them with white chalk. My favorite blackboard story is about Mr. B. J. Lee, principal and algebra teacher. He would write two separate algebra problems on the board and wait a few minutes for the students to solve them. However, before anyone could do this, Mr. Lee would take chalk in each hand and write the solutions to both problems, simultaneously, using both hands, one for each problem.

B. J., as we all called him everywhere except to his face, was a shy man with a keen sense of humor who seemed to know what mischief was brewing before we attempted it. His swift punishments fit the crimes and were dealt out with a twinkle in his eye. One morning a group of boys was seen doing lawn repair, filling in holes, raking and seeding a section of the school front lawn. It seems the night before someone had taken a fast ride over the wet lawn and left unsightly tire tracks. Mr. Lee had called in a student, told him he (Mr. Lee) had matched his tires (the culprit’s) to the damaged grass and “allowed him” to gather a few friends to help with the damage repair and costs. *(continued on page 3)*

NOTE: You are invited to fill this space! I’d like to see your memories, clippings, or excerpts from your reading. Hand them to me or send by fax, mail or email to rpierce@hartford.edu and I’ll edit them for the newsletter. There may be a limit of about 300 words.

Society Directory

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From the Curator's Corner

Starting on May 21, the Old Farm School is open for the season on Sunday afternoons, one to four, until the middle of October. If you want to know how long the school held classes, if you would like to know who was responsible for the bell (which you may ring), a visit will provide these answers and more. The History Center is also open at the same time for the public to view the exhibit on From the Kitchen to the Laundry, 1880s to the early 1900s.

The Tag Sale/Flea Market/Bake Sale on April 28 raised \$806 for the Society. Of this, \$440 came from vendors, \$261 from the tag sale, and \$105 from the bake sale. The event could never have succeeded without the tremendous volunteer service by our members. Beverly Harris did a great job getting publicity into the *Courant*, and a big thank you to Gail Tinto for getting it into the Sunday *Courant*. Our bakers were Doris Albert, Jean Buscarello, Pat Robair, Martha Clark, Meta Hubbard, Libbie Merrow, Gail Tinto, and Lois Ann Weissenburger. Bruce Hale, Jean Buscarello, and Marilyn Stockton manned the bake table. Those helping park cars were Joseph Caldera, Homer Guilmartin, and George and Libbie Merrow. Helping to get this all under way in the beginning were Ralph and Louise Schmoll, who sent out request forms to the vendors, put up signs, and saw that the spaces were marked (the day before) with the assistance of the Merrows. They also manned the History Center, along with Jane Doble, Barbara Merrill, and Beverly Wood. A number of persons help set up on Saturday morning, including Nick Panke, who also helped break down at the end. A thank you to Mary Marchessault and Gail Tinto, who watched the two tables set up for WHS tag sale items. (This year there was an attempt to clean out the area upstairs in the history Center of items which had accumulated from previous sales. The curator trusts that all who volunteered have been publically thanked, and apologizes to any who have been missed.

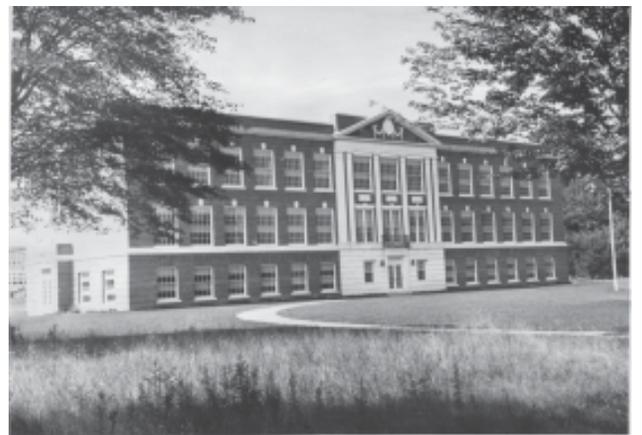
Some items remain available for sale: (1) a crochet afghan, full size, of multicolored squares; (2) Godfrey prints; (3) "Snow Fall," a print by Bruce Gaviabrandt, 1994; (3) Christmas stocking, never used; (4) cuddly puppy design; (5) unique recipe holder with see-through holder to keep off splashes; (6) Oscar de la Renta mauve 100% silk Japanese scarf; (7) scalp massager; (8) Capriland recipe books, spring and autumn; (9) Newfoundland Pictorial Cook Book. Also we have a good many genealogical magazines: *Galaxy*, *New England Ancestors*, *Early American Life*, *Preservation News*, and *New England Genealogical Society*. If you're interested in any item, please call me at 242-1016. I will also have them in my car at the potluck supper on June 6 at Sacred Heart. We also have for sale the chandelier which used to hang in the History Center. It is a five light, 30 X 28 fixture which might look good in your home.

Fannie Gabriel (f.gabriel@att.net)

Old Farm School to participate in Open House

On Saturday, June 9th, the Connecticut Office of Tourism will sponsor the 8th Annual Connecticut. Open House Day, the one-day statewide event designed to pay tribute to Connecticut's unique world of history, art, and tourism. The Wintonbury Historical Society is participating in this event. The Old Farm School and History Center will be open for touring that day from 9 AM until 3 PM.

Bloomfield High School



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Our Publications

Wintonbury to Bloomfield (\$16.50), Images: Old Bloomfield (\$20., or to a member \$18.); History of the Bloomfield Catholic Church (\$15); Bloomfield & the Civil War (\$12); Not Lost ..Gone Before: A History of Latimer Hill Cemetery (on CD \$25); Barnard Genealogy (\$10.); Good Old Days (\$10.); Cook Book (\$7.); **NEW** Over Tunxis Trails, 2nd ed (\$15.); Bicentennial Activities (\$3); Note Paper (8 pk - \$3.); Filley House T shirts (\$12.); Brown Drums and Brown family (\$10.).

Board of Directors Highlights

This report is published in the newsletter because the Society practices transparency in all things. These are not the minutes of the meeting and do not include everything that went on.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS HIGHLIGHTS

At its meeting on May 16, 2012, the Board of Directors heard several reports, approved some policies, and did some planning for the coming year.

Treasurer Charles Dechand reported for the fiscal year July 1, 2011 through April 30 this year that the Society had income of \$7,298 and expenses of \$6,709. Charlie received requests from committees for the next fiscal year and will be building a budget for presentation on June 6.

Curator Fannie Gabriel said that the current exhibit of kitchen and laundry artifacts will stay up for a while. She also received an email that an 1818 Brown drum is for sale. The Board asked that the price be determined before we take any action.

President Richard Pierce announced that at our September 5 meeting Meg Galante-DeAngelis of UConn will present a Civil War program on war work and the lives of children. On November 7 at Prosser Public Library Matthew Warshauer of CCSU will speak on the Copperhead movement during the Civil War.

Fannie Gabriel reported receipts of \$806 from the April 28 Tag and Bake Sale. Other fund raising ideas, such as a holiday tea at an historic home, were discussed. Doug Barnard is investigating the possibility of publishing a 2013 calendar with historic photographs.

The dues structure was revisited, and two new categories were added: \$10 for teachers in Bloomfield schools and \$50 for businesses. Other dues remain the same for 2012-13: \$2 for students, \$15 for individuals, \$25 family membership, \$45 supporting membership, and \$150 life membership.

As a part of our ongoing participation in the Standards and Excellence Program for Historical Societies, we took steps to complete the first phase (Mission, Vision, and Governance). Mission and Vision statements were adopted and are printed in this newsletter. The Board voted to accept a proposed Code of Ethics. A Conflict of Interest Policy and a concomitant Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form were also accepted. The one unfinished item in the first phase is a Strategic Plan, which it is planned to complete by the August Board meeting.

The Best of Times *(continued from page 1)*

Not too many of us drove cars anywhere. Money was not available for such luxuries. We did have the fun of riding a bus, and the drivers/owners of the four or so buses were part of our school experience. Each driver was a well-known personality and all were definitely child-friendly. At the age of sixteen we had to buy tickets to ride the buses, and that gave a good reason to "walk." Sixteen-year-old students from the neighborhood would gather together and start walking, knowing there was a good chance that someone would stop and offer a ride to school.

High School was the center of our lives. We not only learned in the classes, but school was the social center also. Almost every Friday evening there was some sort of activity: talent shows, dances, musicals, plays, and, of course, basketball games. In the Vin Yokabaskas era, basketball drew a large following of loyal fans, and the bleachers were filled for each game. The team was featured in the Hartford newspapers, and the players were well-known in the town and were the "Big Men in School."

Bloomfield "athletes" were male. Back in our day, girls had no competitive sports teams. We played team sports in gym classes and occasionally had a "Play Day" with a different class or visiting school. You would not recognize girls basketball as we played it. It was played half-court—that is, a player could only play offense or defense. Three members of a team played and stayed on their side of the mid-court line. Players could not cross the center line. Defense players tried to obtain the ball and pass to one of the three team members on the offense side to score. Not at all like the running games of today. The rules we had 64 years ago might be good for us aged ladies, now that I think about them.

We learned to add without calculators, searched for information in the encyclopedias in the libraries, put out class magazines with old typewriters and mimeograph machines, and never heard of computers, cell phones, I-pods or the like. Bloomfield was predominantly a farming town. (It was once reported that we had more cows than people living in it.) It was a time when some of our classmates were first or second generation Americans. We went to school during World War II, and many of our graduates served their country in wars since, particularly the Korean War. We may have been poor, moneywise, but we did not know it. We had our families, the community, and good friends to nurture us.

At the reunion it was unanimous: We lived in the Best of Times in the Best of Towns and grew up in the Best of Schools.

Lucy Woodford Wirsul

Calendar of Events

2012

Sept 12 **WHS Regular Meeting**

Nov 7 **WHS Regular Meeting**

A Bit of History

From *The Hartford Courant*, October 17, 1915; reprinted from ProQuest Historical Newspapers. (Some of the text, mostly at the beginning, is difficult to make out.)

The First Baptist Church of Bloomfield recently held an old home day. Among the interesting features of the program, the following history of the church was read by Mrs. C. M. _____.

I can only give you briefly a few [facts] concerning this church, which [was] organized in 1786. It has lived through the nineteenth century and [I] hope that someone may write [someday] that it has survived the twentieth century. Only two churches in the Hartford Baptist Association are older than this one, that of the First Baptist Church, Suffield, organized in [1769], and that at Wethersfield, organized in 1782. We have no records [except] the date of organization until [].

The church building must have been erected previous to or during that year, for I find recorded a subscription for church furniture consisting of one table, one chair, one book, one flagon and two beakers costing \$18. In 1812 it was voted that "Deacon Wait shall take care of the meeting house the ensuing year for the sum of \$2.50."

[. . .]

About this time they paid their minister \$104 a year salary and board. Perhaps the price accounts for the stipulation in the agreement that they were willing to have Mr. Martin preach for them if he would exchange with other ministers part of the time. I can say the church does not feel that way concerning its present pastor.

There are evidence of discipline being more firm than at the present time. If members were absent from the regular services for a few weeks or months they were visited by a committee to ascertain why they were not walking with the church.

In 1815 a petition was sent to the assembly to be known as a Baptist Society, and just 100 years ago it was agreed to be the duty of every member thereof to contribute according to his ability toward defraying the expenses of the society, that one may not be burdened and another eased. Later, a parish having been formed from parts of the three townships, Windsor, Farmington and Simsbury, and called Wintonbury, the name being composed from one syllable of the name of each town, the church was then known as the Baptist Society of Wintonbury.

The name of Oliver Thrall appears as its first moderator, Jeduthun Bumstead its first clerk; Jacob Loomis, John Waters, Elijah Filley, committee. In 1820 a letter was sent to the Hartford Baptist Association requesting admission.

In 1835 the town was incorporated and called Bloomfield. A little later the Baptist meeting house was rented by the town for the purpose of holding elections under such rules as the church committee deemed proper. It was used twelve years or more for this purpose, the rental price varying from \$17 to \$49 per year.

Our friend and adjoining neighbor, Mr. Whiton cast his first vote in this house.

On April 12, 1880, after due deliberation the church voted to lay aside the written articles of faith [adopted in 1814] and take the word of God for their guide in the future. Also during this year the building was repaired and improved, and four years later a vote of thanks was presented by the church to Hiram thrall for his liberal contribution.

We have a personal reminiscence related by one of our late townspeople, Mr. Samuel Mills, which probably was about this time. His mother was a member of this church. When he was a very small boy he remembered his mother saying while they were partaking at their evening meal, "Husband, I do not know as you will approve of what I did today. The Ladies of the Baptist society were talking this afternoon of getting curtains for the windows of our church and I subscribed \$1." The husband replied, "If they will get blinds I will give \$5, and also \$5 to the Congregational Church." The blinds have been in evidence many years.

Churches, like people, sometimes have their troubles. There seems to have been a little difficulty in the early days about a line fence on the church property, and after several meetings to adjust the matter had failed, they secured legal advice, and the record states, "The fence was gently taken up and laid on the line."

In 1845 an instrument of music was bought for \$45 to be used by the choir for sacred music, and Walter Bidwell was paid \$50 for singing. Mr. Whiton tells of attending services in this house when the large congregation taxed the seating capacity even filling the side galleries which were then in position. He remembers when Elim Tuttle, Noah Griswold, Frederick Newberry, Mr. Thrall, James Waterman, Mr. Hubbard and many others would bring large loads of people from different sections of the surrounding country. Again in 1866 the church was improved and repaired at a cost of \$1400 and the recess back of the platform was added. In 1870, \$610 was spend in building new horse sheds.

During the pastorate of Rev. Henry Smith which began in 1882 and by his energetic exertions money was raised by subscriptions to buy the present parsonage and it stands today as an evidence of his love and interest in the cause he loved.

There have been many pastors these 136 years, four of whom have been ordained by this church, Rev. L. W. Wheeler in 1844, Rev. W. S. Knapp in 1845, Rev. George W. Hinkley in 1850 and Rev. Jesse F. Smith in 1899 who now represents this church in Christian teaching and missionary work at Rangoon, Burma. In 1904 while Rev. H. M. Wolfe was our pastor the church was incorporated as the First Baptist Church of Bloomfield.

NOTE: From *Wintonbury to Bloomfield*, the Wintonbury Historical Society's 1983 book, has a brief section on page 17 on the Baptist Church. It says Abel Gillette was one of the founders, locates the church building at the northwest corner of Park and Jerome Avenues, and indicates that in 1920 the church discontinued services and merged with the Blue Hills Baptist Church in Hartford.